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Hindutva's Foreign Tie-up in the 1930s

Archival Evidence

To understand militant Hinduism, one must examine its domestic roots as well as foreign influence. In the 1930s Hindu nationalism borrowed from European fascism to transform 'different' people into 'enemies'. Leaders of militant Hinduism repeatedly expressed their admiration for authoritarian leaders such as Mussolini and Hitler and for the fascist model of society. This influence continues to the present day. This paper presents archival evidence on the would-be collaborators.

MARZIA CASOLARI

'Fascist' was in Sumit Sarkar's words, "till the other day a mere epithet" ('The Fascism of the Sangh Parivar', *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 30, 1993, p 163). It has come to define the ideology and practice of the Hindu militant organisations. It is a commonplace, accepted by their opponents, as well as by those who have a critical, but not necessarily negative, view of Hindu fundamentalism. Defining the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) and, in general, the organisations of militant Hinduism [1] as undemocratic, with authoritarian, paramilitary, radical, violent tendencies and a sympathy for fascist ideology and practice, has been a major concern for many politically oriented scholars and writers. This has been the case with the literature which started with Gandhi's assassination and continues up to the present day with works such as Amartya Sen's *India at Risk* (*The New York Review of Books*, April 1993) and Christophe Jaffrelot's *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India* (Viking, New Delhi, 1996), the latest book published on the subject, or the well known *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags* (Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1993), which came out soon after the destruction of the Babri masjid. As a result, the fascist ideological background of Hindu fundamentalism is taken for granted, never proved by systematic analysis. This is an outcome that is, to a certain extent, explained by the fact that most of the abovementioned authors are political scientists and not historians.

It is a fact that many of those who witnessed the growth of Hindu radical forces in the years around the second world war were already convinced of the Sangh's fascist outlook. Particularly acute was the perception that the Congress had of these organisations and their character. There is no need to mention the already well known opinion of Nehru, who, right from the beginning, had pointed at these organisations as communalist and fascist.

Less well known is the fact that, as shown by a confidential report circulated within the Congress most probably at the time of the first ban of the RSS, after Gandhi's assassination, the similarity between the character of the RSS and that of fascist organisations was already taken for granted. In fact, the report itself states that the RSS

> (1) ...Started in Nagpur some sort of Hindu Boys Scout movement. Gradually it developed into a communal militarist organisation with violent tendencies.
> (2) The RSS has been purely Maharashtrian brahmin organisation. The non-brahmin Maharashtrians who constitute the bulk of C P and Maharashtra have no sympathy with it.
> (3) Even in the other provinces the chief organisers and whole-time workers will be found to be inevitably Maharashtrian brahmins.
> (4) Through the RSS the Maharashtrian brahmins have been dreaming of establishing in India 'a Peshwa Raj' after the withdrawal of Britishers. The RSS flag is the Bhagwa Flag of the Peshwas – Maharashtrian rulers [who] were the last to be conquered by the British – and after the termination of British rule in India, the Maharashtrians should be vested with political powers.
> (5) The RSS practises secret and violent methods which promote 'fascism'. No regard is paid to truthful means and constitutional methods.
> (6) There is no constitution of the organisation; its aims and objects have never been clearly defined. The general public is usually told that its aim is only physical training, but the real aims are not conveyed even to the rank and file of the RSS members. Only its 'inner circle' is taken into a confidence.
> (7) There are no records or proceedings of the RSS organisation, no membership registers are maintained. There are also no records of its income and the expenditure.
> The RSS is thus strictly secret as regards its organisation. It has consequently... (National Archives of India (NAI), Sardar Patel Correspondence, microfilm, reel no 3, 'A Note on the RSS', undated).

Unfortunately the document stops abruptly here, but it contains enough evidence of the reputation the RSS already had by the late 1940s.

This document, however, is by no means exceptional. An accurate search of the primary sources produced by the organisations of Hindu nationalism, as well as by their opponents and by the police, is bound to show the extent and the importance of the connections between such organisations and Italian fascism. In fact the most important organisations of Hindu nationalism not only adopted fascist ideas in a conscious and deliberate way, but this happened also because of the existence of direct contacts between the representatives of the main Hindu organisations and fascist Italy.

To demonstrate this, I will reconstruct the context from which arose the interest of Hindu radicalism in Italian fascism right from the early 1920s. This interest was commonly shared in Maharashtra, and must have inspired B S Moonje's trip to Italy in 1931. The next step will be to examine the effects of that trip, namely how B S Moonje tried to transfer fascist models to Hindu society and to organise it militarily, according to fascist patterns. An additional aim of this paper is to show how, about the end of the 1930s, the admiration for the Italian regime was commonly shared by the different streams of Hindu nationalism and the main Hindu leaders.

Particular attention will be devoted to the attitude adopted by the main Hindu organisations during the second world war. During those crucial years, Hindu nationalism seemed to uneasily oscillate between a conciliatory attitude towards the British,

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and a sympathy for the dictators. This is in fact far from surprising because – as will be shown – in those years, militant Hindu organisations were preparing and arming themselves to fight the so-called internal enemies, rather than the British.

More generally, the aim of this paper is to disprove Christophe Jaffrelot's thesis that there is a sharp distinction between nazi and fascist ideology on one side and RSS on the other as far as the concept of race and the centrality of the leader are concerned.[2]

I
Hindu Nationalists and Italian Fascism

None of the works mentioned above, Jaffrelot's included, deals with what I consider a most important problem, namely, the existence of direct contacts between the representatives of the fascist regime, including Mussolini and Hindu nationalists. These contacts demonstrate that Hindu nationalism had much more than an abstract interest in the ideology and practice of fascism.

The interest of Indian Hindu nationalists in fascism and Mussolini must not be considered as dictated by an occasional curiosity, confined to a few individuals, rather, it should be considered as the culminating result of the attention that Hindu nationalists, especially in Maharashtra, focused on Italian dictatorship and its leader. To them, fascism appeared to be an example of conservative revolution. This concept was discussed at length by the Marathi press, right from the early phase of the Italian regime.

From 1924 to 1935 *Kesari* regularly published editorials and articles about Italy, fascism and Mussolini. What impressed the Marathi journalists was the socialist origin of fascism and the fact that the new regime seemed to have transformed Italy from a backward country to a first class power. Indians could not know, then, that, behind the demagogic rhetoric of the regime, there was very little substance.

Moreover, the Indian observers were convinced that fascism had restored order in a country previously upset by political tensions. In a series of editorials, *Kesari* described the passage from liberal government to dictatorship as a shift from anarchy to an orderly situation, where social struggles had no more reason to exist.[3] The Marathi newspaper gave considerable space to the political reforms carried out by Mussolini, in particular the substitution of the election of the members of parliament with their nomination (ibid, January 17, 1928) and the replacement of parliament itself with the Great Council of Fascism. Mussolini's idea was the opposite of that of democracy and it was expressed by the dictator's principle, according to which 'one man's government is more useful and more binding' for the nation than the democratic institutions (ibid, July 17, 1928).[4] Is all this not reminiscent of the principle of 'obedience to one leader' ('ek chalak anuvartitva') followed by the RSS?

Finally, a long article of August 13, 1929, 'Italy and the Young Generations', stated that the Italian young generation had succeeded the old one to lead the country. That had resulted in the 'fast ascent of Italy in every field'. The article went on to describe at length the organisation of the Italian society according to fascist models. The principal reasons of the discipline of the Italian youths were strong religious feelings, widespread among the population, attachment to the family, and the respect of traditional values: no divorce, no singles, no right to vote for women, whose only duty was to sit at home, by the fireplace. The article focused then on the fascist youth organisations, the Balilla and the Avanguardisti.

One may wonder how the Indian journalists could be so well informed about what was going on in Italy. Very possibly, among their sources there was a pamphlet in English, published by an Italian editor in 1928, entitled *The Recent Laws for the Defence of the State* (copy in NAI, Foreign and Political Department, 647G, 1927). Emphasised, right from the beginning, was the importance of the National Militia, defined as "the bodyguard of the revolution". The booklet continued with the description of the restrictive measures adopted by the regime: a ban on the "subversive parties", limitations to the press, expulsion of "disaffected persons" from public posts, and, finally, the death sentence.

Significantly, the shift from the liberal phase to fascism is described by the pamphlet in strikingly similar terms to those employed by the above-mentioned articles:

> This step [the shift to fascism] has struck a death blow to the thread-bare theories of Italian liberalism, according to which the sovereign state must observe strict neutrality towards all political associations and parties. This theory explains why in Italy the ship of state was drifting before the wind, ready to sink in the vortex of social dissolution or to be wrecked on the rocks of financial disaster.

Another inspiring source of the literature published in *Kesari* must have been the work by D V Tahmankar, the correspondent of the Marathi newspaper from London and admirer of the Italian dictator. In 1927 Tahmankar published a book entitled *Muslini ani Fashismo*, (Mussolini and Fascism), a biography of the dictator, with several references to the organisation of the fascist state, to the fascist social system, to the fascist ideology, and to Italy's recent past. An entire chapter, the last, was devoted to description of fascist society and its institutions, especially the youth organisations.

One can easily come to the conclusion that, by the late 1920s, the fascist regime and Mussolini had considerable popularity in Maharashtra. The aspects of fascism which appealed most to Hindu nationalists were, of course, both the militarisation of society and what was seen as the real transformation of society, exemplified by the shift from chaos to order. The anti-democratic system was considered as a positive alternative to democracy which was seen as a typically British value.

Such literature made an implicit comparison between fascism and the Italian Risorgimento. The latter's influence on Indian nationalism, both moderate and radical, is well known.[5] However, whereas the Risorgimento appealed to both moderates and extremists, fascism appealed only to the radicals, who considered it as the continuation of the Risorgimento and a phase of the rational organisation of the state.

The first Hindu nationalist who came in contact with the fascist regime and its dictator was B S Moonje, a politician strictly related to the RSS. In fact, Moonje had been Hedgewar's mentor, the two men were related by an intimate friendship. Moonje's declared intention to strengthen the RSS and to extend it as a nationwide organisation is well known. Between February and March 1931, on his return from the round table conference, Moonje made a tour of Europe, which included a long stop-over in Italy. There he visited some important military schools and educational institutions. The highlight of the visit was the meeting with Mussolini. An interesting account of the trip and the meeting is given in Moonje's diary, and takes 13 pages (Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML), Moonje papers, microfilm, rn 1).[6]

The Indian leader was in Rome during March 15 to 24, 1931. On March 19, in Rome, he visited, among others, the Military College, the Central Military School of Physical Education, the Fascist Academy of Physical Education, and, most important, the Balilla and Avanguardisti organisations. These two organisations, which he describes in more than two pages

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of his diary, were the keystone of the fascist system of indoctrination – rather than education – of the youths. Their structure is strikingly similar to that of the RSS. They recruited boys from the age of six, up to 18: the youths had to attend weekly meetings, where they practised physical exercises, received paramilitary training and performed drills and parades.

According to the literature promoted by the RSS and other Hindu fundamentalist organisations and parties, the structure of the RSS was the result of Hedgewar's vision and work. However Moonje played a crucial role in moulding the RSS along Italian (fascist) lines. The deep impression left on Moonje by the vision of the fascist organisation is confirmed by his diary:

> The Balilla institutions and the conception of the whole organisation have appealed to me most, though there is still not discipline and organisation of high order. The whole idea is conceived by Mussolini for the military regeneration of Italy. Italians, by nature, appear ease-loving and non-martial like the Indians generally. They have cultivated, like Indians, the work of peace and neglected the cultivation of the art of war. Mussolini saw the essential weakness of his country and conceived the idea of the Balilla organisation...Nothing better could have been conceived for the military organisation of Italy...The idea of fascism vividly brings out the conception of unity amongst people...India and particularly Hindu India need some such institution for the military regeneration of the Hindus: so that the artificial distinction so much emphasised by the British of martial and non-martial classes amongst the Hindus may disappear. Our institution of Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh of Nagpur under Dr Hedgewar is of this kind, though quite independently conceived. I will spend the rest of my life in developing and extending this Institution of Dr Hedgewar all throughout the Maharashtra and other provinces.

He continues describing drills and uniforms:

> I was charmed to see boys and girls well dressed in their naval and military uniforms undergoing simple exercises of physical training and forms of drill.

Definitely more meaningful is the report of the meeting with Mussolini. On the same day, March 19, 1931 at 3 pm, in Palazzo Venezia, the headquarters of the fascist government, he met the Italian dictator. The meeting is recorded in the diary on March 20, and it is worth reproducing the complete report.

> ...As soon as I was announced at the door, he got up and walked up to receive me. I shook hands with him saying that I am Dr Moonje. He knew everything about me and appeared to be closely following the events of the Indian struggle for freedom. He seemed to have great respect for Gandhi. He sat down in front of me on another chair in front of his table and was conversing with me for quite half an hour. He asked me about Gandhi and his movement and pointedly asked me a question "If the Round Table Conference will bring about peace between India and England". I said that if the British would honestly desire to give us equal status with other dominions of the Empire, we shall have no objection to remain peacefully and loyally within the Empire; otherwise the struggle will be renewed and continued. Britain will gain and be able to maintain her premier position amongst the European Nation (*sic*) if India is friendly and peaceful towards her and India cannot be so unless she is given Dominion Status on equal terms with other Dominions. Signor Mussolini appeared impressed by this remark of mine. Then he asked me if I have visited the University. I said I am interested in the military training of boys and have been visiting the Military Schools of England, France and Germany. I have now come to Italy for the same purpose and I am very grateful to say that the Foreign Office and the War Office have made good arrangements for my visiting these schools. I just saw this morning and afternoon the Balilla and the Fascist Organisations and I was much impressed. Italy needs them for her development and prosperity. I do not see anything objectionable though I have been frequently reading in the newspapers not very friendly criticisms about them and about your Excellency also.
>
> Signor Mussolini: What is your opinion about them?
>
> Dr Moonje: Your Excellency, I am much impressed. Every aspiring and growing Nation needs such organisations. India needs them most for her military regeneration. During the British Domination of the last 150 years Indians have been waved away from the military profession but India now desires to prepare herself for undertaking the responsibility for her own defence and I am working for it. I have already started an organisation of my own, conceived independently with similar objectives. I shall have no hesitation to raise my voice from the public platform both in India and England when occasion may arise in praise of your Balilla and Fascist organisations. I wish them good luck and every success.
>
> Signor Mussolini – who appeared very pleased – said – Thanks but yours is an uphill task. However I wish you every success in return.
>
> Saying this he got up and I also got up to take his leave.

The description of the Italian journey includes information regarding fascism, its history, the fascist 'revolution', etc, and continues for two more pages.

One can wonder at the association between B S Moonje and the RSS, but if we think that Moonje had been Hedgewar's mentor, the association will be much clearer.[7] The intimate friendship between Moonje and Hedgewar and the former's declared intention to strengthen the RSS and to extend it as a nationwide organisation prove a strict connection between Moonje and the RSS. Moreover, it makes sense to think that the entire circle of militant Hinduism must have been influenced by Moonje's Italian experience.

II
Moonje's Plans for Militarising Hindus

Once Moonje was back in India, he kept the promise made in his diary and started immediately to work for the foundation of his military school and for the militant reorganisation of Hindu society in Maharashtra. He really did not waste time, for, as soon as he reached Pune, he gave an interview to *The Mahratta*.[8] Regarding the military reorganisation of the Hindu community, he stressed the necessity to 'indianise' the army and expressed the hope that conscription would become compulsory and an Indian would be put in charge of the defence ministry. He finally made a clear reference to the Italian and German examples:

> In fact, leaders should imitate the youth movement of Germany and the Balilla and Fascist organisations of Italy. I think they are eminently suited for introduction in India, adapting them to suit the special conditions. I have been very much impressed by these movements and I have seen their activities with my own eyes in all details.

Soon fascism became a subject of public debate and Hedgewar himself was among the promoters of a campaign in favour of the militarisation of society, according to fascist patterns. On January 31, 1934, Hedgewar presided over a conference about fascism and Mussolini, organised by Kavde Shastri. Moonje made the concluding speech (NMML, Moonje papers, microfilm, Diary, rn 2, 1932-36).

A few months later, on March 31, 1934 Moonje, Hedgewar and Laloo Gokhale had a meeting, the subject of which was again the military organisation of the Hindus, along Italian and German lines:

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Laloo – Well you are the president of the Hindu Sabha and you are preaching Sanghathan of Hindus. It is ever possible for Hindus to be organised?
I said – You have asked me a question of which exactly I was thinking of late. I have thought out a scheme based on Hindu Dharm Shastra which provides for standardisation of Hinduism throughout India...But the point is that this ideal cannot be brought to effect unless we have our own swaraj with a Hindu as a dictator like Shivaji of old or Mussolini or Hitler of the present day in Italy and Germany...But this does not mean that we have to sit with folded hands untill (*sic*) some such dictator arises in India. We should formulate a scientific scheme and carry on propaganda for it (NMML, ibid).

The intimate connection between Moonje and the RSS and the fascist character of the latter is confirmed by British sources. An Intelligence report published in 1933 and entitled 'Note on the Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh', ascribed to Moonje the responsibility of the reorganisation of the Sangh in the Marathi speaking districts and in the Central Provinces in 1927. The report, describing the activity and the character of the RSS, warned that

> It is perhaps no exaggeration to assert that the Sangh hopes to be in future India what the 'Fascisti' are to Italy and the 'Nazis' to Germany (NAI, Home Poll Department, 88/33, 1933).

Summing up, contrary to Jaffrelot's interpretation, it is clear that the Hindu nationalists were very much attracted by the figure of a strong leader. Moreover, they were keen to give their organisation a strongly centralised structure.

Moonje's trip to Italy, contrary to what happened in the case of Subhas Chandra Bose and other nationalists, did not give place to any further co-operation between Hindu nationalism and the fascist regime. However, these contacts were important at the ideological and organisational levels. In fact, Moonje kept his promise to improve military education in India and, as soon as he came back from his European trip, he started to contact all those who could support his idea of militarising Hindu society. In 1934, Moonje started to work for the foundation of his own institution, the Bhonsla Military School.[9] For this purpose, in the same year he began to work at the foundation of the Central Hindu Military Education Society, whose aim was

> to bring about military regeneration of the Hindus and to fit Hindu youths for undertaking the entire responsibility for the defence of their motherland

to educate them in the 'Sanatan Dharma', and to train them "in the science and art of personal and national defence" (NMML, Moonje papers, subject files, n 24, 1932-36, 'The Central Military Education Society', undated, probably written in 1935). Moonje's programme was therefore entirely devoted to Hindu society, and not to Indian society as a whole.

It is possible that the other function of the society was that of facilitating the diffusion of military education and supporting the foundation of new schools. During the preliminary work for the foundation of both the school and society, Moonje publicly admitted that his idea of militarily reorganising Hindu society was inspired by the 'military training schools of England, France, Germany and Italy" (NMML, Moonje papers, subject files, n 23, 1934-36, report of the progress of the work of the society from January 1, 1935 to August 15, 1936). Moreover, there is an explicit reference to fascist Italy and nazi Germany in a document that Moonje circulated among those influential personalities who were expected to support the foundation of the school (NMML, Moonje papers, subject files, n 25, 1935, 'Preface to the Scheme of the Central Hindu Military Society and Its Military School'). It said at the outset:

> This training is meant for qualifying and fitting our boys for the game of killing masses of men with the ambition of winning victory with the best possible casualties (*sic*) of dead and wounded while causing the utmost possible to the adversary.

Moonje does not give any clear-cut indication regarding this 'adversary', whether it was the external enemy, the British, or the 'historical' internal enemy, the Muslims. The document continues with a long dissertation on the relation between violence and non-violence. In it are drawn many examples from Indian history and Hindu holy books, all in favour of organised violence, in the form of militarism. On the contrary, non-violence is considered a form of renunciation and cowardice.

Moonje's views corresponded almost perfectly with Mussolini's opinions:

> ...The same thought is repeated though in a more forceful and direct language by Signor Mussolini, the maker of modern Italy. When he says: "Our desire for peace and collaboration with Europe is based on millions of steel bayonets."

And again, from Mussolini's *Doctrine of Fascism*,

> I absolutely disbelieve in perpetual peace which is detrimental and negative to the fundamental virtues of man, which only by struggle reveal themselves in the light of the sun.
> War alone brings up to its highest tension all human energy and puts the stamp of nobility upon the peoples who have the courage to meet it.
> Fascism believes neither in the possibility nor the utility of perpetual peace. It thus repudiates the doctrine of pacifism which is born of renunciation of the struggle and an act of cowardice in the face of sacrifice.

Moonje added that these considerations did not aim at the legitimation of a climate of civil war. Contrary to the Indian situation, where the British were responsible for the maintenance of public order, peace should rise from the self-defence of a militarily organised nation. Italy and Germany could offer a further example:

> His Majesty, the King of Italy, says: "Italy wants the longest possible period of peace but the greatest guarantee for a peace is the efficiency of the Italian armed forces. The government was striving to augment the efficiency of forces, which depends upon the cadres, materials and the unity of command. Efforts must be made to improve the physique of the Italian youths and their preliminary training in order to raise the level of soldierly efficiency."

As far as Germany was concerned, Moonje quoted a booklet entitled *Wehrwissenschaft* (Military Science), written by Ewald Banse, a professor at the Brunswick Technical High School:

> "The starting point of the book is that war is inevitable and certain and that it is imperative to know as much about it and to be as efficient as possible ... the mind of the nation, from childhood on must be impregnated and familiarised with the idea of war", because, the Professor says: "The dying warrior dies more easily when he knows that his blood is ebbing for his national god."

The spirit of the last sentence is surprisingly coincident with the essence of the Hindu nationalism.

When Moonje had to indicate practical ways of militarising Hindu society, he returned again to the example of Italy and its military and paramilitary organisations, and reported what he had seen. He described in detail the structure of the 'She Wolf's Children', the Balilla and the Avanguardisti. He asserted that these organisations could provide paramilitary training to the male population from the age of 8 up to 18, when the youth became young fascists. Italy was therefore in a position of having "command of 6,000,000 trained and disciplined men ready to face any emergency".

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The result was that

> The Balillas are taught to build up moral character and take the first steps towards becoming soldiers.

As a consequence,

> There will thus be no longer any distinction between the citizen and the soldier between the civilian and the man in uniform.

Of course, nowadays we know that, in spite of this remarkable number of militarily trained citizens, Italy lost the war: Moonje did not know that the level of the training was low, the cohesion between people poor, and the fascist faith of the people skin-deep.

Fascist ideas were widespread among Hindu nationalists, at least in Maharashtra. The above-mentioned script had been printed in the form of a pamphlet (copy in NAI, Jayakar papers, microfilm, fn6, rn2) and distributed not only among the people Moonje tried to involve in his project, but, most probably, to an even wider public. Fascism therefore, had a certain popularity, which, unfortunately, is at present difficult to measure.

III
Eve of Second World War

After Moonje's trip to Italy there was no further direct contact between exponents of the main Hindu organisations and the Italian government. However, by the end of the 1930s Italian representatives in India established some connections with the extremist fringes of Hindu nationalism. The Italian consulate in Bombay was very active in seeking contacts with the local political milieu. The Italian diplomatic mission in Bombay was part of a network linking the Italian consulates in Bombay and Calcutta with the radical movements of Maharashtra and Bengal (author's PhD thesis, pp 276-79).

From June 1938 the consulate in Bombay started to 'recruit' as many Indian students as possible for Italian language courses, with the purpose of indoctrinating them with propaganda in favour of Italy and fascism. The person in charge of this activity was Mario Carelli, sent from Rome with the specific purpose of organising and managing the Italian activities in Bombay. Mario Carelli was secretary and librarian at the Institute for Middle and Far East (ISMEO), founded in Rome in 1933 under the auspices of the Italian government, and presided by Giovanni Gentile.[10]

Among the students, one Madhav Kashinath Damley was particularly promising. Following Carelli's suggestion, Damley translated into Marathi Mussolini's *Doctrine of Fascism* and, in summer 1939, published it as a series of articles in a weekly he founded in June of the same year. The name of the magazine was *Lokhandi Morcha* (Iron Front). It published also, as a five parts article, a booklet by Antonio Pagliaro entitled *Il Fascismo contro il comunismo* (Fascism against Communism) and an article by Mario Carelli entitled 'The Institution of the House of the Fasci and Corporations'.[11]

In the autumn of 1939, a particularly radical article published in the *Lokhandi Morcha* attracted the attention of the police. The result was that Damley, who had already been noticed by the agents, was forced to suspend the magazine and pay a fine. The refusal to pay determined the cessation of the publication of the *Lokhandi Morcha*. Damley was a chitpavan brahmin from Pune, resident in Bombay. His father owned the printing house where the magazine was printed. According to the police,

> He [Damley] holds extreme political views and believes himself to be a follower of B G Tilak...He openly says that he is enamoured of the history of Italy and Nazi Germany (MSA, Home Special Department, 830(I)1939, note dated July 11, 1939).

Even more meaningful is Damley's description by the Italian consul:

> Holding fascist ideas, he founded an organisation called Iron Guards, modelled on ours, but adapted to Indian peculiar conditions.
> He and his friends wore the black shirt: India's first black shirts.
> The development of this organisation was compromised by the outbreak of the war.[12]

The influence of fascist ideology and practice must have gone far beyond the limits of the main organisations of Hindu militant nationalism and must have extended to the wide and intricate net of secondary militant groups and centres of physical education or paramilitary training. This is shown by the example of the Swastik League, founded on March 10, 1929 by M R Jayakar – who became its president – and by other local personalities. In organising the Swastik League, Jayakar, who had a prominent position within the Hindu Mahasabha, drew some inspiration from the fascist paramilitary organisations. In his own words,

> in the near future, our GOC... intends to form a cadet corps, consisting of boys between the age of 15 and 18 years. The training which these cadets will receive will ultimately enable them to join the League's volunteer corps...
> This reminds us of a picture published in the *Sunday Chronicle* on the 28th instant, showing two of Sgr Mussolini's "Baby Soldiers" remaining on sentry duty at the entrance of their annual encampment at Camp Dux, where the young members of the Avan Guardista, (*sic*) a youth organisation of Italy for boys from 14 to 18 years of age, get first hand acquaintance with the tools of war. Neither we nor our cadets can expect to be able to get such a direct training, but all the same, the efforts to train a boy in military discipline will never be wasted and will in course of time make that boy an ideal volunteer (NAI, Jayakar papers, microfilm, rn 13, *Swastik Herald*, of November 7, 1934).

In 1940, when nazism manifested its real nature and the swastika became an inauspicious symbol, the organisation felt obliged to dissociate from nazism:

> Hitler discriminates between Aryans and non-Aryans, between Germans and Jews. The League, though it is a purely Hindu organisation, does not make a difference between the Hindus and the non-Hindus... Hitler has many enemies, the League cannot have any. He is revengeful; the League is forgiving and tolerant. He is violent and wild; the League is not. He thinks and acts in terms of destruction. He has destroyed many families, many nations: nay, the peace of the world. Armed to teeth he is running amuck. The League stands for construction. He is an enemy of humanity. The League is a saviour of humanity. It has saved thousands of human lives. Its ambulance is most efficient (NAI, ibid, Article entitled 'Hitler and the Swastik League' in *Swastik Herald*, July-August 1940).

IV
Savarkar and Nazism

At this point we have to dwell on the crucial problem of Savarkar's position vis-a-vis the European radical right.

With Savarkar's coming on the political scene, from the late 1930s to the second world war, there was the attempt, even if timid and unsuccessful, to search for new contacts with the totalitarian regimes. At the same time, there was an intensification of cries in favour or in defence of Italian and German policy, even if the preference for Germany increased progressively.

Savarkar was declared president of the Hindu Mahasabha as soon as he was released in 1937, and he held that office until 1942. His presidentship covered the most sensitive period of both Indian and international history in this century. According to the commonly accepted opinion – supported by the organisations of militant Hinduism – the RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha have never been particularly

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close, and, during Savarkar's presidentship, they severed their links. Reality, however, seems to be different. In fact, the available documentation shows not only that such a split never happened, but that the two organisations always had close connections. We should not forget that Hedgewar had been secretary to the Hindu Mahasabha from 1926 to 1931 (NAI, Home Poll Department, August 28, 1942; intelligence report 'Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh', dated March 7, 1942).[13] The RSS seems to have provided support to the Hindu Mahasabha, as shown by the fact that groups of RSS militants used to gather at the public meetings organised to celebrate Savarkar's release.[14]

Two of the main topics of the speeches Savarkar gave at the gatherings organised in his honour and at any other public function of his party were the international situation and Hindu-Muslim relations.

Regarding the first aspect, Savarkar had a rather cynical view of the relations India should entertain at the international level. He returned to freedom and entered into politics at the time of the formation of the Rome-Berlin Axis and Japan's adhesion to the pact. Such an outcome was favourably assessed by Hindu radical nationalism, including the Hindu Mahasabha.

'India's foreign policy' was the subject of a speech Savarkar gave to about 20,000 people in Pune on August 1, 1938. The following are the most meaningful parts of the speech, according to a press note issued by the Bombay office of the Hindu Mahasabha:[15]

> He observed India's foreign policy must not depend on "isms". Germany has every right to resort to Nazism and Italy to Fascism and events have justified that those isms and forms of governments were imperative and beneficial to them under the conditions that obtained there. Bolshevism might have suited Russia and Democracy as it is obtained in Briton (*sic*) to the British people.

Political systems correspond then to the nature of the respective population. This theory was clearly inspired by a deterministic conception of race, similar to the conception of race then dominant in Europe.

Starting a controversy with Nehru, Savarkar openly defended the authoritarian powers of the day, particularly Italy and, even more so, Germany:

> Who are we to dictate to Germany, Japan or Russia or Italy to choose a particular form of policy of government simply because we woo it out of academical attraction? Surely Hitler knows better than Pandit Nehru does what suits Germany best. The very fact that Germany or Italy has so wonderfully recovered and grown so powerful as never before at the touch of Nazi or Fascist magical wand is enough to prove that those political "isms" were the most congenial tonics their health demanded.
>
> India may choose or reject particular form of government, in accordance with her political requirements. But Pandit went out of his way when he took sides in the name of all Indians against Germany or Italy. Pandit Nehru might claim to express the Congress section in India at the most. But it should be made clear to the German, Italian, or Japanese public that crores of Hindu Sanghatanists in India whom neither Pandit Nehru nor the Congress represents, cherish no ill-will towards Germany or Italy or Japan or any other country in the world simply because they had chosen a form of government or constitutional policy which they though (sic) suited best and contributed most to their national solidarity and strength.

Savarkar went on to defend Germany's position regarding the Sudeten problem:

> ...as far as the Czechoslovakia question was concerned the Hindu Sanghatanists in India hold that Germany was perfectly justified in uniting the Austrian and Sudeten Germans under the German flag. Democracy itself demanded that the will of the people must prevail in choosing their own government. Germany demanded plebiscite, the Germans under the Czechs wanted to join their kith and kin in Germany. It was the Czechs who were acting against the principle of democracy in holding the Germans under a foreign sway against their will...Now that Germany is strong why should she not strike to unite all Germans and consolidate them into a Pan-German state and realise the political dream which generations of German people cherished.

When the outbreak of the second world war was imminent, Savarkar openly declared the attitude Hindu Mahasabha should adopt towards the other nations:

> Any nation who helps India or is friendly towards her struggle for freedom is our friend. Any Nation which opposes us or pursues a policy inimical to us is our foe. Towards those who do neither, India must maintain an attitude of perfect neutrality refusing to poke her nose unnecessarily into their internal or external policy.

This document summarises Savarkar's view regarding international problems and, at the same time, it contains the future lines of the Hindu Mahasabha foreign policy. This party elaborated its foreign policy only with Savarkar's presidentship, imitating, in a certain sense, what Nehru did within the Congress, but choosing different allies among the foreign powers.

Given the content of the above-mentioned speech, it is no wonder that it was published on November 30, 1938 by a famous German daily, the *Volkischer Beobachter* (NMML, Savarkar papers, microfilm, rn 1 part 2, March 1937-May 1938).

The reference to the German minorities in Czechoslovakia was an implicit comparison with the Indian situation. As Savarkar asserted in a speech in the presence of some 4,000 people at Pune on October 11, 1938, if a plebiscite had taken place in India, Muslims would have chosen to unite with Muslims and Hindus with Hindus. This was a consequence of the principle according to which it was not enough living together for a few centuries to form a nation, as "The common desire to form a nation was essential for the formation of a nation" (MSA, Home Special Department, 60D(g) Pt II, 1937, 'Extract from the weekly confidential report of the District Magistrate, dated the October 21, 1938).

During Savarkar's presidentship the anti-Muslim rhetoric became more and more radical, and distinctly unpleasant. It was a rhetoric that made continuous reference to the way Germany was managing the Jewish question. Indeed, speech after speech, Savarkar supported Hitler's anti-Jewish policy, and, on October 14, 1938, he suggested the following solution for the Muslim problem in India:

> A Nation is formed by a majority living therein. What did the Jews do in Germany? They being in minority were driven out from Germany (MSA, Home Special Department, 60 D(g) Pt III, 1938, 'Translation of the verbatim speech made by V D Savarkar at Malegaon on October 14, 1938).

Then, towards the end of the year in Thane, in front of RSS militants and local sympathisers, right at the time when the Congress expressed its resolution against Germany,[16] Savarkar stated that

> in Germany the movement of the Germans is the national movement but that of the Jews is a communal one (MSA, Home Special Department, 60 D(g) Pt III, 1938, 'A report on the meeting held on December 11, 1938).

And again the next year, on July 29, in Pune, he said:

> Nationality did not depend so much on a common geographical area as on unity of thought, religion, language and culture. For this reason the Germans and the Jews could not be regarded as a nation (MSA, ibid, 'Extract from the BP weekly letter n 31, dated August 5, 1939).

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Without this unity, not even Muslims and Hindus could be regarded as belonging to the same nation. Indian Muslims should rather resign themselves to be considered as a minority, the recognition of whose rights should depend on the magnanimity of the majority.

Finally, at the end of 1939, on the occasion of the 21st session of the Hindu Mahasabha, Savarkar made one of the most explicit comparisons between the Muslim question in India and the Jewish problem in Germany:

> ...the Indian Muslims are on the whole more inclined to identify themselves and their interests with Muslims outside India than Hindus who live next door, like Jews in Germany.[17]

One can find a certain continuity between the ideas of nation and nationhood expressed in Savarkar's *Hindutva*[18] and the content of these declarations. Indeed in his book, Savarkar, referring to the Muslims, asserted that

> their holyland is far off in Arabia or Palestine. Their mythology and godmen, ideas and heroes are not the children of this soil. Consequently their names and their outlook smack of foreign origin (*Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*, 4th ed, Bharat Mudranalaya, Pune, 1949, p 94).

A feeling of admiration for the Jewish policy of Germany seems to have been shared by the entire circle of Hindu nationalism at the end of the 1930s. In *We, or Our Nationhood Defined*, Golwarkar, who would have become general secretary of the RSS a year later, declared that

> German national pride has now become the topic of the day. To keep up the purity of the nation and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the semitic races – the Jews. National pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible it is for races and cultures, having differences going to the mot [?], to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by (Nagpur, 1939, p 37).

This had its roots in the idea that being a Hindu was a matter of race and blood, not only a matter of culture. In turn that was an idea which was strikingly similar to the racial myths elaborated in Germany, more than in Italy.

As demonstrated by Jaffrelot (op cot, pp 53-54), Golwarkar drew his idea of nation and nationalism from the works of a German lawyer, Johann Kaspar Bluntschli.

Golwarkar's position regarding Muslims was even more extreme than Savarkar's:

> in one word, they [Muslims] must cease to be foreigners[19] or may stay in the country wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment, not even citizen's rights (op cit, p 52).

Apart from the militants of the main Hindu organisations, there is reason to think that the Indian – and particularly Marathi – public opinion also was exposed to the views of some newspapers which echoed Savarkar's declarations[20] or published articles in favour of the dictators. In 1939 *The Mahratta* published a series of articles in favour of the international policy of Italy and Germany,[21] while *Kesari* of December 8 and 15, 1939 published an article bearing the title 'Failure of Democracy and Rise of Fascism'. There the same interpretation already expressed during the 1920s was repeated, according to which fascism arose from the crisis of democracy. Fascism of obviously considered superior to democracy.

While this literature still focused on both the dictators and their policies, already from the Spring of 1939 the Savarkar-led Hindu Mahasabha seemed to have finally chosen Germany as its main reference point at the international level. On March 25, 1939 the Hindu party made the following statement:

> Germany's solemn idea of the revival of the Aryan culture, the glorification of the Swastika, her patronage of Vedic learning and the ardent championship of the tradition of Indo-Germanic civilisation are welcomed by the religious and sensible Hindus of India with a jubilant hope. Only a few socialists headed by Pandit J Nehru have created a bubble of resentment against the present government of Germany, but their activities are far from having any significance in India. The vain imprecations of Mahatma Gandhi against Germany's indispensable vigour in matters of internal policy obtain but little regard insofar as they are uttered by a man who has always betrayed and confused the country with an affected mysticism. I think that Germany's crusade against the enemies of Aryan culture will bring all the Aryan nations of the world to their senses and awaken the Indian Hindus for the restoration of their lost glory (The declaration contained in Auswartiges Amt-Politischen Archiv (AA-PA, Bonn)/Pol VII, statement by the spokesman of the Hindu Mahasabha, March 25, 1939, is quoted by M Hauner, op cit, p 66).

The aggressive racial policy carried out by Germany must have played a fundamental role in this shift of interest from Italy to Germany.

At the practical level, this shift was represented by the attempt made by Savarkar to get in touch with other Hindu nationalist forces working abroad. Throughout 1938 Savarkar had a considerable exchange of letters with one of the historical leaders of the revolutionary movement abroad: Rash Behari Bose. (On Rash Behari Bose see Uma Mukherjee, *Two Great Indian Revolutionaries*, Firma KLM, Calcutta, 1966). Rash Behari, who had lived in Japan since 1915 and had obtained Japanese nationality in 1923, was in touch with the Japanese extreme right, in particular with the 'Association of the Black Dragon' (ASMAE, AP, Giappone (Japan), b 6, 1934, b Movimento Panasiatico (Pan-Asiatic Movement), express telegram n 166/113, from Italian Embassy, Tokyo, February 24, 1934, to the Ministry of External Affairs, signed Auriti).

According to our sources, Savarkar and Rash Behari were in touch at least from March 1938. A couple of letters from Rash Behari to the president of the Hindu Mahasabha were published by *The Mahratta*, for propaganda purposes.[22] The expected effect of the publication of the two letters was that

> All Hindu Sanghatanists in India find themselves strengthened in their views and activities to see you advocating the cause of Hindu Sanghatan and taking up such a far seeing and insighted a view of the Indian situation political and social (NMML, ibid, August 18).

In the summer of 1938 Rash Behari informed Savarkar of his intention to open a branch of the Hindu Mahasabha in Japan. Even if the number of the militants was small, it could nevertheless become

> an authorised international mouth piece of the Hindu Mahasabha and Hindudom as such in Eastern foreign countries (NMML, ibid).

Savarkar's reply was favourable: the president of the Hindu Mahasabha invited Rash Behari to realise his objective as soon as possible, and advised him that the Japanese branch of the party should depend upon the main office in India (NMML, ibid, letter from Savarkar to Rash Behari Bose, November 14, 1938, signed President Hindu Maha Sabha).

In winter the closeness between the two leaders was such that Savarkar asked Rash Behari to send a message to the Hindu Mahasabha session of December 28 (NMML, ibid).

The contacts that Savarkar tried to establish with the consulates of the axis powers in Bombay did not bring any noticeable result. Most probably this happened because the outbreak of the war made collaboration with foreign powers much more difficult.

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The only result of these contacts – which could materialise only through the German consulate – was, most probably, the circulation of the already mentioned speech of Savarkar in the German newspapers,[23] in exchange for articles in favour of Germany's Jewish policy in the Marathi newspapers.[24] The person in charge of contacting the axis representatives was Jugalikishor Birla (NMML, ibid, letter from Savarkar to Birla, November 2, 1938, signed by hand VDS), while the two Germans in charge of dealing with the Hindu Mahasabha were G L Leszczynski, representative of the German News Agency, and P Pazze, officially manager of a company located in Bombay. These two agents had been responsible for the publication of Savarkar's speech in the *Volkischer Beobachter* (NMML, ibid, letter from the secretary of the Hindu Mahasabha to Pazze, November 19, 1938, and, with the same date, letter from Leszczynski to Malekar).

The most evident sign of these contacts was the despatch of a copy of *Mein Kampf* from Leszczynski to Savarkar.

V
Waiting for the Right Enemy

The literature promoted by militant Hinduism is trying nowadays to compare the attitude adopted by the Hindu Mahasabha towards the totalitarian regimes with Subhas Chandra Bose's position towards the axis powers. According to this literature, the evidence in favour of such interpretation is a meeting which took place between Bose and Savarkar in Bombay in June 1940.[25] On this occasion Savarkar is supposed to have suggested to Subhas that he should go to Europe and seek the dictators' support. Whereas the authors connected to the above-mentioned school of thought consider this claim a matter of fact, I could not find any record of the talks between the two leaders. According to a short article in the *Times of India* of June 24,

> Mr Bose had also talks with Mr V D Savarkar, president of the All India Hindu Mahasabha, at the latter's residence at Dadar on Saturday evening. It is understood that the discussions related to the present political situation in the country and the steps the Hindu Mahasabha and the 'Forward Bloc' should take in co-operation with other parties. The results of the talks, it is stated, were not encouraging.

The episode, as always, did not go unnoticed by the police, who gave a brief account of it:

> Subhas Chandra Bose arrived in Bombay on June 22nd and had discussions with M A Jinnah and V D Savarkar with a view of exploring the possibilities of co-operation between the Forward Bloc and the Hindu Mahasabha respectively. Bose's efforts were apparently productive of no result. The Bombay Forward Bloc endeavoured to arrange a meeting on June 23rdat which Subhas Chandra Bose would speak, but it was necessary to abandon the meeting on account of lack of support (MSA, Home Special Department, 1023, 1939-40, SA dated June 29, 1940, 'Forward Bloc').

The absence of accounts by the Hindu Mahasabha on the meeting can be explained by the fact that, both the leaders being involved in anti-British activities, it would not make sense leaving records of sensitive matters. Not even among Bose's papers and writings is there any reference to the meeting. It is therefore impossible to reconstruct the content of the talks between the two leaders, unless we trust the only source available. This is the speech made by Savarkar on the occasion of the dissolution of the Abhinav Bharat in 1952. It is weak evidence, because it is not supported by any written proof, and was given several years after the event.

My impression of the episode is that it is a sort of historiographic invention, directed to legitimise the otherwise ambiguous position of the Hindu Mahasabha during the war. Asserting that Netaji's project had Savarkar's sanction means not only that Savarkar had a sort of patronage on Bose's activities in Europe, but, more important, that Savarkar played an important role in the freedom fight.

Certainly the meeting did take place, and very possibly the two leaders discussed Bose's intention to go to Europe and seek the support of the axis powers. However, all this is far from meaning that Savarkar inspired Bose, who, right from 1933, had his own connections with the dictators' governments. The president of the Hindu Mahasabha put forward his claim on the content of his meeting with Netaji four years after Gandhi's assassination, when the image of the Hindu Mahasabha and its affiliations were badly damaged by the suspicion of their involvement in the murder. Accordingly it makes sense to think that the organisations of militant Hinduism must have perceived the necessity to rehabilitate their political past and re-invent a more clear-cut anti-British stand. What stronger argument, therefore, could be available than the assertion that the Hindu Mahasabha was secretly ready to support Bose's plans?

The involvement in Gandhi's assassination was not the only reason of crisis: the image of Hindu nationalism was indeed already damaged by the ambiguous attitude adopted in the war period. The policy actually followed by Hindu nationalism during the war, namely, responsive co-operation, was far from being unambiguous on both transfer of powers and relations with the British. In fact, the ambivalence of responsive co-operation was made explicit by Savarkar himself in a 1942 presidential speech. On that occasion Savarkar stated that: "the policy of responsive co-operation...covers the whole gamut of patriotic activities from unconditional co-operation to active and even armed resistance... (L G Khare (ed), *Hindu Rashtra Darshan*, Bombay, 1949, p 266). It comes as no surprise that this ambiguous stand raised almost universal suspicion towards the forces of militant Hinduism and invited the charge of collaborationism.[26]

Immediately after the outbreak of the war, the Hindu Mahasabha decided that its working committee of September 10, 1939 should adopt the following line of conduct:

> no reference should be made to the justice or otherwise of the claim of residents of Danzig to return to the Reich; for, in principle we shall have to support the action of the Germans of Danzig; not that we should denounce this but then under no circumstances can we take part in this war on the side of British (NMML, Savarkar papers, microfilm, rn 12, cit, letter from Mandlekar to Savarkar, September 7, 1939).

The working committee of September 10 decided which steps should be taken in order to prepare the nation to face the emergency provoked by the outbreak of the war:

> As the task of defending India from any military attack is of common concern to the British government as well as ourselves and as we are unfortunately not in a position today to carry out that responsibility unaided, there is ample room for wholehearted co-operation between India and England (NMML, Moonje papers, subject files, n 51).

The preliminary condition for such co-operation was the devolution of full powers to a central Indian government by the British. Later on, the Hindu Mahasabha would be less strict than the Congress on this issue.

The committee wished for the realisation of the militarisation of Indian society and the Indianisation of the army. It requested a reform of the Arms Act, along the lines prevailing in the UK. It demanded also that territorial forces and paramilitary groups be strengthened, that new military organisations be created in those provinces where they did not exist before, and,

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finally, that more Indian students be accepted in the military academies. The Hindu Mahasabha requested the government to increase the local production of modern armaments so that India could equip its army, without depending on imports from other nations.

Soon after this resolution, the Hindu Mahasabha started to work for the creation of a national militia. Naturally enough, Moonje became the person in charge. Inviting party members to attend a preliminary meeting for the foundation of the militia, in Pune on October 8, Moonje described the future organisation in the following terms:

> I have the pleasure in bringing to your notice a resolution of the Hindu Mahasabha for the organisation of the Hindu Militia in the country for the purpose of taking part in the defence of India both from external and internal aggression, whenever an occasion of emergency may arise during the course of the Anglo-German War.
>
> ... I believe that it will be quite in the fitness of things, in view of the historic All-India Military leadership of the Maharashtra, that a beginning should be made in the Maharashtra; so that the lead may be taken up by the whole of India afterwards (NMML, ibid, circular letter dated September 27).

Who could be the internal aggressors if not the Muslims?

The answer seems to be contained in a letter from Moonje to Khaparde of October 18:

> ... the Moslems are making themselves a nuisance. The Congress government will not stand up but will yield to them. We cannot expect any consideration at the hands of the Congress government. We shall have to fight both the government and the Moslems just as the Khaksars are doing in the UP. The Hindu Mahasabha will give its support to such fights as the Muslim League is supporting the Khaksars: you must prepare the volunteers in your towns. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh may be useful and handy (NMML, ibid).

Moonje expressed in more explicit terms his hostility to the Congress:

> But there is one worry which is menacingly uppermost in its mind at the present moment and that is – what will happen if, in the mutually antagonistic and clashing ideologies, the Charka were to come into conflict with the Rifle ...? (NMML ibid, circular letter).

Charka as a Gandhian symbol was a metaphor for the Congress.

The theme of the 'internal enemy' is a further element of affinity between the ideology of fascism and of Hindu nationalism, expressed by a similar rhetoric. It seems nevertheless that the Sanghatanists were inclined to fight the Muslims and the Congress, rather than the British.

According to Moonje's plans, the RSS should be involved in the creation of the national militia. Indeed, in a letter of October 18 to General Nanasahib Shinde of Baroda, Moonje affirmed

> I am glad to note that you have approved of my idea of a Hindu National Militia for Maharashtra as is being organised by the Hindu Mahasabha.
>
> I have been myself thinking of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and I am corresponding with their leader. They may have their peculier (*sic*) difficulties and the point is that the militia should be organised under these circumstances whether the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh can undertake the task or not (NMML, ibid, reply to a letter from Shinde to Moonje, dated October 16, 1939).

During this preliminary phase, Moonje consulted Hedgewar, with whom he exchanged several letters and whom Moonje hoped to meet, in order to discuss the participation of the RSS in the militia (NMML, ibid, letter from B S Moonje to Hedgewar, October 18, 1939).

On October 27 a militant from Lahore informed Moonje that

> We have at present in Punjab several Dals and Sanghs, the total number of members of which is approximately about 50,000; but they are not working under a single organisation. There are Rashtriya Sevak Sangh, Atma Sangh, Mahabir Dal, Seva Sangh and Akali Dal working under different leaders. They have a sort of military organisation. The Akali Dal is armed with swords: but the others have other weapons. The Rashtriya Sevak Sangh has only lathies. The first thing to do is to bring all these sanghs on a uniform basis working under a single leadership though not of one man but of a council (NMML, ibid).

In spite of such mobilisation, the Hindu militia had not been formed. The government did not withdraw the existing restrictions imposed on military and paramilitary organisations and schools.

It is difficult to establish if the organisations of militant Hinduism were arming themselves against possible foreign invaders, the internal enemy, or the British. Most probably they were carefully hedging their bet, ready to take advantage of any future development. However, it is a fact that at a meeting with Linlithgow in Bombay on October 9, 1939, Savarkar adopted a decidedly conciliatory position vis-a-vis the British. According to Linlithgow

> the situation, he [Savarkar] said, was that His Majesty's Government must now turn to the Hindus and work with their support. After all, though we and the Hindus have had a good deal of difficulty with one another in the past, that was equally true of the relations between Great Britain and the French and, as recent events had shown, of relations between Russia and Germany. Our interests were now the same and we must therefore work together. Even though now the most moderate of men, he had himself been in the past an adherent of a revolutionary party, as possibly, I might be aware. (I confirmed that I was). But now that our interests were so closely bound together the essential thing was for Hinduism and Great Britain to be friends; and the old antagonism was no longer necessary. The Hindu Mahasabha, he went on to say, favoured an unambiguous undertaking of Dominion Status at the end of the war. It was true, at the same time, that they challenged the Congress claim to represent anything but themselves (India Office (IO), Mss Eur F 125/8 1939, Letters to the Secretary of State for India: the letter is dated October 7, but the report of the meeting is in the postscript on October 9).

In 1940 the Hindu Mahasabha declared its intention to take part in the viceroy's executive council and the war office. We should not forget that neither the Hindu Mahasabha nor the RSS took part in the Quit India movement. The position they maintained in that period is clearly depicted by Savarkar's declaration of February 17, 1942, when he asserted that, if Japan, after having approached the Indian borders and invaded the country, had been ready to declare the independence of India, it would have incredibly "boosted" Indians' imagination. The British should therefore give the impression that fighting beside them meant fighting for freedom.[27] It seems, in other words, that the Hindu Mahasabha (and probably its affiliations) was more interested in succeeding the British, if possible with their complicity, rather than fighting them.

The other side of this ambiguous stand was a blatant admiration for the European dictators. According to a police report of May 1942, regarding the activities of Poona Officers Training Camp of April-May,

> Dr P C Sahasrabudhe addressed the volunteers on three occasions. On 4.5.42 he announced that the Sangh followed the principle of dictatorship. Denouncing democratic government as an unsatisfactory form of government, he quoted France as a typical example and, praising dictatorship, he pointed to Japan, Russia and Germany. He particularly praised the Fuehrer principle of Germany. On 21.5.42 he drew attention to the value of propaganda, quoting Russia and Germany

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as examples, and again extolled the virtues of the leader principle, citing Mussolini's success as a further example (NAI, Home Poll Dept 28/8/1942, 'Summary of a report on the officers' Training Camp of the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh held in April/May 1942 at Poona', copy in MSA, Home Special Dept, 822 IInd 1940-41).

When, in the 1940s, the totalitarian regimes had already revealed their true colours, the attitude of the organisations of militant Hinduism towards fascism and nazism was still benevolent. In spite of the already, even if only partially, known atrocities committed by Hitler and Mussolini, the main organisations of Hindu nationalism still praised the dictators and their regimes. This position could be justified, had it been part of a coherent and strong anti-British policy. However, as I have tried to demonstrate, the forces of Hindu nationalism seem to have concentrated their efforts more against the so-called internal enemies – Muslims and Congress – rather than the foreign invaders. While Bose's alliance with the axis powers had mainly an anti-British function, the Hindu Mahasabha used its support to the dictators as an instrument to blackmail the British.

VI
Conclusions

The preceding discussion has shown that: (a) the main historical organisations and leaders of Hindu nationalism had a distinctive and sustained interest in fascism and nazism; (b) fascist ideological influences on Hindu nationalism were present and relevant; and (c) to a certain extent, these influences were channelled through direct contacts between Hindu nationalists and members of the Italian fascist state. No doubt, beginning with the early 1920s, and up to the second world war, Hindu nationalists looked at the political reality of fascist Italy, and subsequently of nazi Germany, as a source of inspiration.

One of the results of the contacts between fascism and Hindu nationalism was the attempt to militarise Hindu society and to create a militant mentality among the Hindus. If it is true that the Hindu society elaborated its own patterns of militarisation – I refer to the shakas as a typically Indian phenomenon – it is equally true that a most relevant result of fascist influence was the transmission of a more functional organisation and a stronger political character to the already existing organisations of political Hinduism.

At the ideological level, the most meaningful effect of the fascist influence is represented by the way in which Hindu nationalism developed its own concept of diversity, transforming 'diverse' people into enemies. Of course, the concept of internal enemy is already implicit contained in Savarkar's *Hindutva*. Nevertheless, the continuous reference to German racial policy and the comparison of the Jewish problem in Germany with the Muslim question in India reveals the evolution of the concept of 'internal enemy' along explicitly fascist lines.

In my opinion, if one wants to understand the evolution of Hindu radicalism in the post-independence period, one has to take into account both the domestic roots of this phenomenon and the external influence on its development.

In the 1920s and 1930s fascism was an international phenomenon. As such it was bound to influence the ideology and practice of similar movements all over the world. Since many of Bal Thackeray's most outraceously anti-Muslim and racist statements are literal quotations of Savarkar's speeches and theories, it is legitimate to conclude that such influence is still alive in today's militant Hinduism. EPW

Notes

[My stay in India for collecting material for the present paper was made a lot easier and more profitable by Partha Sarathi Gupta. T R Sareen, A R Kulkarni and Bhanu Kapil. While writing this paper in Italy I was able to count on Michelguglielmo Torri's criticisms and suggestions, which forced me to considerably rework my first draft. I wish to warmly thank all of them for their help and friendship. Of course, the usual disclaim stands that I am the only one responsible for the contents of and any error left in this article.]

1 In the following pages I will treat the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS as two different organisations, belonging to the same political milieau. This, in spite of the attempt made by the BJP or RSS oriented intellectuals and scholars to deny, or at least to minimise any reciprocal affinity between the RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha. Speaking about a topic which has nothing to do with the relations between the RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha, I will indirectly show that the two organisations shared a specific ideological background.

2 Regarding this aspect, Jaffrelot asserts that "As distinct from Nazism, the RSS's ideology treats society as an organism with a secular spirit, which is implanted not so much in the race as in a socio-cultural system ... Finally, in contrast to both Italian fascism and Nazism the RSS does not rely on the central figure of the leader" (op cit, pp 63-64).

3 The details mentioned in the text are in *Kesari*, May 13, 1924, June 24, November 10 and 24, 1925. I will just summarise the content of the articles, having had this material translated from Marathi by a young Indian colleague of mine.

4 The article quotes a speech of Mussolini, without specifying its date.

5 Regarding this aspect, see Paolo Beonio Brocchieri and Giorgio Borsa (eds), *Garibaldi, Mazzini e il Risorgimento nel risveglio dell'Asia e dell'Africa* (Garibaldi, Mazzini and the Italian Risorgimento in the awakening of Asia and Africa), Franco Angeli, Milan, 1984.

6 Unfortunately there is no Italian report of the meeting, not even among the prime minister's papers. But there are the routine papers, recording Moonje's request for an audience, dated March 16, 1931 and the response of the cabinet of the minister of the external affairs, dated March 18: Archivio Storico Ministero degli Affari Esteri (Historical Archives Ministry of External Affairs ASMAE), Rome, Udienze (Audiences), 1930-33, bundle 27, letter from the British Embassy in Rome, to the Ministry of External Affairs, March 16, 1931 and reply from the cabinet of the minister, n 1102, March 18, 1931. The British authorities in Rome managed Moonje's audience.

7 It was indeed Moonje who brought up the young Hedgewar in his own house and, later sent him to Calcutta, officially to study at the National Medical College, but with the secret aim to get in touch with the revolutionary organisations in Bengal (B V Deshpande and S R Ramaswamy, *Dr Hedgewar the Epoch-Maker*, Sahitya Sindhu, Bangalore, 1981, pp 14-32).

8 *The Mahratta*, April 12, 1931, 'Dr B S Moonje on Round Table Conference'. Special Interview for *The Mahratta*, paragraph entitled 'National Militia'. A report of Moonje's tour of Europe is in M N Ghatate, 'Dr B S Moonje – Tour of European Countries' in N G Dixit (ed), *Dharmaveer Dr B S Moonje. Commemoration Volume. Birth Centenary Celebration 1872-1972*, Nagpur, 1972, p 68.

9 Moonje was interested in the problem of military education already by the end of 1920s. He was in favour of Indianisation of the army. In 1927 he worked at the foundation of the Aeroclub of India, while in 1929 he was a member of the commission for the selection of candidates to Sandhurst Military Academy. In the same year he founded the Rifle Association in Nagpur (see correspondence in NMML, Moonje papers, microfilm, Letters, rn 7, 1926-28).

10 References to the above-mentioned activities of the Italian consulates in Bombay are in Giovanni Gentile Foundation, Rome, Correspondence from third parties to Gentile, f Carelli Mario, undated letter, certainly written on June 29, 1938 and letter dated October 11, 1938.

11 The articles are in the issues of July 6, August 10 and July 27, 1939 respectively: Central State Archives (ACS), Minculpop (Ministry of Popular Culture), b 17 bis, f 26, Gran Bretagna, subfile 14, R Consolato Bombay (Royal Consulate Bombay), report n 1904/St 3, August 4, 1939, from Italian Consulate, Bombay, to the Ministry of Popular Culture.

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A copy of Carelli's article is in MSA, Home Special Dept, 830 (I) 1939.

12 "Di idee fasciste, ha fondato un'organizzazione da lui chiamata 'Iron Guards' prendendo a modello le nostre, ma adattandole alle peculiari condizioni dell'India. Egli e i suoi amici vestivano la camicia nera: le prime camicie nere dell'India. Lo sviluppo di questa organizzazionee stato compromesso dallo scoppio della guerra": ACS, Minculpop, 17 bis, cit, report n 2298/St 3, from Italian Consulate, Bombay, October 4, 1939, to the Ministry of Popular Culture.

13 It seems, moreover, that Hedgewar was deeply influenced by the ideas expressed in Savarkar's *Hindutva*. When Hedgewar decided to found his organisation, he went to Ratnagiri to meet Savarkar, in order to obtain from him suggestions and advice. Subsequently, during Sarvarkar's internment in Ratnagiri, Hedgewar had continuously been in touch with Babarao Savarkar. See, respectively, Deshpande-Ramaswamy, op cit, p 65 and 74; Walter K Andersen, Shridhar D Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Hindu Revivalism*, Vistaar Publications, New Delhi, 1987, p 33; Dhananjay Keer, *Veer Savarkar and His Time*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1988, pp 170-71. Among Hedgewar papers, in Nagpur, I found several letters exchanged between Hedgewar and Babarao Savarkar, who was closely connected to the RSS.

14 On several occasions, after having been released, Savarkar congratulated "the Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh of Dr Hedgewar of Nagpur on its work and discipline". At the 'guru purnima' celebrated by the RSS on July 29, 1939, Savarkar gave a speech to approximately 5,000 people, while several years later, during the RSS officers' training camp (OTC) which took place in Pune during May 27 to 29, 1943, in the presence of Golwarkar, Babarao Savarkar, B S Moonje and about 5,000 people, the former president of the Hindu Mahasabha expressed his pleasure to see the display by swayamsevaks in great number and said that he was "proud to see the branches of the Sangh spread throughout India during his visits to various places...He was pleased to see the Hindu youths, boys and girls, joining the institutions, based on Hinduism, in great number". Militants had also the habit of collecting donations for their leader. In August 1937 in Pune, the local Hindu militants and sympathisers offered him Rs 250. Several years later, on the occasion of Savarkar's 61st birthday, considerable donations were collected by the exponents of the Hindu organisations Savarkar visited during one of his propaganda tours. At the above-mentioned OTC camp, where Savarkar celebrated his birthday, Rs 1,80,000 had been collected by Hindu organisations, Pune municipality, and private citizens. Respectively in MSA, Home Special Dept, 60 D (g) Pt II, 1937, Extract from the Bombay Secret Abstract for week ending January 15, 1938, entitled 'Hindu Affairs' and 'Summary report of the meeting held in the Tilak Smarak Mandir on behalf of Poona students', August 3, 1937; Maharashtra State Archives (MSA), Home Special Dept, 60 D (g) Pt III, 1938, 'Extract from the Bombay Province weekly letter No 31, dated August 5, 1939'; MSA, Home Special Department, 1009 III 1942, police report entitled 'A summary report of the concluding ceremony of the Officers' Training Camp of the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh, at Poona on the May 27, 1943' and note from the Home Department Special, dated June 10, 1943.

15 NMML, Savarkar papers, microfilm, rn 23, part 2, Miscellaneous Correspondence January 1938-May 1939, 'Press Note issued by the Hindu Mahasabha Office Bombay Branch', undated A summary of Savarkar's speech is also in MSA, Bombay, Home Special Department, 60 D (g) Pt III 1938, 'Extract from the weekly confidential report of the District Magistrate, Poona, dated the August 11, 1938'.

The Italian consul in Calcutta sent to the ministry of external affairs in Rome an accurate abstract of an article about Savarkar's speech, reported in *Ananda Bazar Patrika* of August 3. The abstract is entitled 'Critiche al viaggio di Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in Europa' (Critiques of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's trip to Europe), in ASMAE Affari Politici (Political Affairs AP), India, b 7, 1938, resoconto della stampa indiana (summary of the Indian press), enclosure to express telegram n 3489/46, from Italian Consulate, Calcutta, August 12, 1938, to the ministry of external affairs.

16 Immediately after the great anti-Jewish pogrom of November 9, 1938, known as 'Crystal night', the Congress expressed its condemnation of the German policy with the declaration of December 12, and subsequently supported the concession of asylum in India to the Jews. Regarding this matter, see Milan Hauner, *India in Axis Strategy: Germany, Japan and Indian Nationalists in the Second World War*, Klett-Cotta Stuttgart, 1981, p 67.

17 A summary of the presidential speech is in *Bombay Chronicle* of December 29, 1939.

18 *Hindutva* had been written clandestinely during Savarkar's detention at the Andamans, sent to India secretly in 1917 and published underground in 1923.

19 Savarkar, as well as most of the militants belonging to his milieu, considered the Indian Muslims either as successors of the Mughal invaders, or as original Hindus who were forcibly converted to Islam. In any case, according to the main ideologues of political Hinduism the pole of attraction of Indian Muslims was outside India and Hindu system of values. Not only was Islam a 'foreign' religion, which had its main institutions outside India, but the Indian Muslims were, according to Savarkar and his companions, more interested in creating a separate nation, instead of recognising India as their homeland. Apart from the fact that this must have not been the attitude of most of Indian Muslims, militant Hindus had exaggerated claims towards the Muslims. For militant Hindus it was not sufficient that Indian Muslims considered themselves first Indians and secondly Muslims, as most of them probably did. According to the Hindu fundamentalists, indeed, Muslims should conform themselves to the Hindu system of values, which was, of course, unacceptable.

20 An article entitled 'The Savarkar Method of rejuvenation of the Hindudom: New Drive in Hindu Thought and Action', published in *The Mahratta* of January 6, 1939 repeated the opinions already expressed by Savarkar in the speech of December 11, 1938.

21 April 28, 1939, 'Why Italy Invaded Albania?', May 26, 'How Germany's National Socialism Arose?' and 'Inciting Mussolini against Hitler', May 19 and June 2, 'Germany-Rome Axis Strengthened' and 'German-Italian Pact Concluded: Reaction to Encirclement Policy'. At p 51 of his book, Jaffrelot quotes some articles in favour of Franco, Mussolini and Hitler published by the *Hindu Outlook* of November 2 and 30, 1938 and *The Mahratta*, of November 6, 1939.

22 To the two letters, dated March 7 and August 11, 1938 respectively, there is a reference in NMML, Savarkar papers, microfilm, r n 23, letter dated May 23, 1938 from the secretary, Hindu Mahasabha, Bombay Office to Rash Behari Bose; unsigned letter dated August 11 to the editor of *The Mahratta*, Gajantrao Ketkar; August 18 from J D Malekar, secretary of the Hindu Mahasabha to Rash Behari Bose.

23 Copy of the press note containing the text of the speech had been sent also to Rash Behari, so that he would not only publish, but also show it to the Japanese government: NMML, Savarkar papers, rn 23, cit, letter from the secretary of the Hindu Mahasabha to Rash Behari Bose, November 4, 1938.

24 NMML, ibid, letter from Malekar to Leszczynski, December 7, 1938 and reply, December 9, 1938. At the ministry of external affairs, in Rome, among the papers from the cabinet of the ministry, I could find a copy of Savarkar's *The Indian War of Independence of 1857*: it is not possible to establish if the book arrived in Italy during this period, before, or later. We are, however, allowed to suppose that Savarkar was not totally unknown to the Italian authorities: ASMAE, Gab 409, b3.

25 In favour of this thesis are: (1) Vikram Savarkar, Vinayak's grandson, whom I met in Bombay in March 1997; (2) Vishvas Savarkar, author of a script entitled 'Veer Savarkar INA's Source of Inspiration', in Savarkar, commemoration volume published by Savarkar Darshan Pratisthan, Bombay, 1989, pp 147-51. In the same volume; (3) Shivramu (pseud), 'Savarkar's Role in The British Quitting India', pp 183-88; (4) D Keer, op cit, p 257; (5) N B Khare, *Political Memoirs*, Nagpur, 1959, p 52; (6) U Mukherjee, op cit, pp 159-60; (7) S V Bhalerao, *Savarkar: His Socio-Political Thought and Leadership*, a PhD thesis submitted to the Nagpur University, faculty of social sciences, p 234-35.

26 Regarding the collaborationist attitude of the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS, see D R Goyal, *Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh*, Radha Krishna Prakashan, New Delhi, 1979, p 86.

27 NMML, Savarkar papers, microfilm, rn 24. Unfortunately, the photocopies of this document have never been mailed to me by the staff. I could only summarise from my notes, instead of quoting the original text.

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